

**Historic District Commission
Town Hall, Room 126
Final Meeting Minutes, August 26, 2014**

Meeting called to order at 7:30 PM. Attending Kathy Acerbo-Bachmann (KAB), David Honn (DH), Pamela Lynn (PL), Anita Rogers (AR).

Mike Gowing as BofS rep.

Absent: Ron Regan (RR), David Foley (DF) and David Shoemaker (DS)

7:30 PM Citizens' Comments and Questions

Recently there have been problems with email to HDC members. Pam will investigate the issue.

7:35 PM Review of Open Applications and Existing Violations

Open Applications:

14 Newtown Road (DH) 1427 requires letters to abutters
25-27 School St. (RR) 1426 consideration of exterior changes only
62 Windsor Ave. (AR) an addition
82 River St. (PL) solar panels and satellite dish violation
25 Windsor Ave (DS) roof replacement

Violations:

24 River St. – satellite dish – FR will follow up
511 Mass. Ave. – venting did not conform to COA. AR will check.
69/71 School St. DH will check status of muntins
102 Main St. – needs to be checked
14 – 20 School St. – have received a letter from Mr. Su about
his concerns about the remedy for window violations

Documentation Outstanding:

Letter for the Asa Parlin House application

COA for 25 Windsor Ave.

**8:00 PM Application 1422 – Public Hearing: Construction of New Homes at
540 Massachusetts Avenue – “Flannery Way”**

KAB explained to the citizens the sequence of the public hearing and read the public hearing notice.

KAB explained that during a previous hearing the HDC had determined that it does have purview for this application over that which can be seen from the public way.

Zoning by right allows construction of two-family building on each property. A portion of the lots are in the district. The project’s civil engineer but not the architect was present. Bruce Ringwall (BR) represents the applicants.

The lots have been created by combining several contiguous properties. An existing right-of-way was converted to a private street (“Flannery Way”) by previous Planning Board approval. This approval allows the right to create the two lots under discussion. Village Residential (VR) zoning requires a minimum of 15,000 square feet on each of the two lots. Each of the lot sizes conforms to zoning.

BR described the site lines from the public way. The HDC had previously determined that only the front facades were visible from the public way (Massachusetts Avenue) and thus those facades are under the HDC’s review purview. It was noted that if the building orientations were altered, the side facades might be visible and thus subject to review. The applicant has not altered the building orientations for this review. The buildings are proposed to be identical with respect to form, massing windows, doors and other architectural features.

Front façade design modifications have been made since the HDC last reviewed the project at the meeting of August 12, 2014. The applicants have responded to previous requests by HDC members to enlarge the soffits in overhanging over the garage doors and to use garage doors windows with 2 over 1 lites. The garage doors will have

three lites as requested. Roof shingles will be “architectural” style asphalt in lieu of three-tab design. The dormers have been modified. One shed style dormer has replaced separate, multiple gabled dormers.

The question remains due to how far the buildings will be from the public way whether both or either “Hardie” boards and non-wood windows would be satisfactory. The eave line will now appear to have different levels.

The site plan was reviewed. Trees along the private way include a 28” and 18” caliper maples. The design intent is to retain these trees by narrowing the width of the driveways. It is anticipated that one large tree will be removed but additional smaller ones are to be retained.

Questions from HDC members....

AR asked about the proposed floor heights. The first floor height is 9ft, the second 8 ft. with a 10” separation and 8ft. The height is slightly different between the two buildings. AR asked whether there are attic windows. BR responded that there are not windows into the attics.

A physical window sample was examined by the HDC. The sample had muntin bars between glass lites. Historically, the HDC has not approved this type of window. Simulated divided lites (SDL) are the preferred window type. DH and AR explained that half panes and applied grills are better. AR suggested looking further to find windows without mitered corners. The windows need better details. It was noted that non-wood materials are being considered only because they are likely to be minimally visible from the public way. This is not a typical historic district streetscape.

“Azek” fiber cement with wood grain has been proposed for the corner boards.

DH asked about the dimensions of the corner boards. The applicant responded that the corner boards as drawn are 1x5 and 1x6. DH’s concern is that they appear too narrow. 1x8 and 1x10 were suggested.

In general, DH remains concerned about the garage doors having the dominant location in the front facades where one would expect to see a porch in a historic district. More remote parking in lieu of parking in front of the buildings was suggested. DH believes the shed dormer is a step in the right direction but more glass would improve the design further. By making the windows less high and longer, the façade would, in effect, appear more linear. If the dormer had a still more significant soffit and a larger overhang, it might further add to this effect.

The front façade is quite large, 50 feet long by 31 feet high. However, the detailing as depicted is too narrow, and insubstantial, i.e. the detailing does not coordinate with the mass of the building. BR indicated that they had made what they thought were the suggested changes. The brackets, corner boards, trim and soffits need to be more rigorous and substantial to match the mass.

KAB summarized that DH is troubled by having the garage doors in the front. One way to mitigate this concern is to enhance other details so that this says this is a house not a garage. The focus is on the occupant/ Pedestrian perspective and experience not the vehicle's prominence.

AR shared DH's frustration. This proposal feels like it is more about product selection than architecture. For instance, one way to minimize the mass of this building is to lower the ridge. Why does this type of building require a nine feet ceiling but then it leaves eight feet on the second floor? There would be plenty of clearance for the garage doors. AR feels the applicants should try to minimize the overall height. The windows currently feel under-scaled which should be remedied.

Simulated wood grain is not preferable. Less grain provides a better effect. Painted wood houses do not show the wood grain.

KAB explained that these materials such as hardie boards are rarely accepted.

PL expressed appreciation for the modifications that have been made but concurs with DH and AR's specific suggestions about details and roof lines.

KAB reminded the applicants that normally both this type of plan and materials would not be considered by the HDC.

BR responded that the front elevation should be reviewed in light of the fact that the buildings are located behind three existing buildings on Massachusetts Avenue and that there is considerable vegetation. There is a limited view especially as Flannery Way is not a prominent street scape in the district. The adjacent building is higher which will minimize the effect of the proposed façades.

KAB asked the citizens to follow the traditional public hearing question format.

Lucy Indge and Jon Haggerty of 542 Mass. Ave were concerned that the end of their driveway will become a parking lot. They are concerned that the view of the proposed buildings is highly dependent upon the two hemlocks at the end of the driveway remaining intact. They are concerned about the longevity of the trees. They suggest that an 8' foot fence would be a suitable remedy. They are also concerned about the timing of this proposal. BR clarified that the planning has been ongoing for several years and that the occupants who previously owned their house knew of the proposed plans and signed property transference deeds to that effect.

Eddie Flannery indicated that putting in a fence is a reasonable request.

LI asked about the timing of construction and whether Flannery Way would be widened. BR and EF indicated that existing plantings are not going to be removed.

KAB clarified that the applicants have a year to start from the date of a favorable decision.

JH is concerned about the increase in traffic down Flannery Way which will be visible from their living room. BR clarified that the buildings could have included more bedrooms (four instead of three for each unit) but their proposal does not maximize the possibility.

JH is also concerned about the scale of these buildings compared to their

home. BR thinks the set back and slightly lower topographical elevation will mitigate this concern.

Bob Miller of 84 Windsor Ave. has thoughts but no questions beyond noting that in the past the HDC has tried to prevent buildings being constructed behind existing structures in the district.

Donna Miller believes potential buyers would wish nine feet ceilings. She asked how many feet back from Massachusetts Avenue the buildings would be? BR indicated 234 to 280 feet back. DM asked about the proposed fence and BM reminded everyone that HDC must approve fence design and materials.

Richard and Chris O'Toole of 17 Kinsley Rd. asked about the HDC's purview. He also asked about the existence of concern for details in the HDC's procedures. KAB explained how each project is unique and is reviewed as such. There are no formulaic reviews.

DM asked about the porch railings, whether they should be more substantial.

DH explained how finer points are often determined progressively as the plans evolve.

MG of 93 Harris Street, speaking as a citizen, thinks there is a dearth of windows on these buildings and asked BR to respond to the windowless quality of the front. The efficacy of the garage impacts the potential for windows. By pulling the entries around to the front as requested by members of the HDC, the possibility of windows on the façade was reduced. Perhaps a punch window near the door would help MG suggested.

JH and BM expressed concern about the duplex nature of the two buildings.

RO asked about the issue of timing in accepting or denying this project.

KAB explained the decision options at this point and closed the public comment section of the public hearing.

Considering the location and the future visibility of the location AR feels the screening, specifically vegetation, should be kept or required to be replaced. She appreciates the effort to reduce the public way. BR indicated that the applicants are willing to install an appropriate fence to screen the project from 542 Mass. Ave.

BR reiterated that the applicants remain willing to entertain changes. AR continues to feel that pulling the ridge down to reduce the scale is important. Conceptually this is a bungalow, not a Victorian.

KAB summarized AR's viewpoint. If this were a traditional site, HDC would be asking about how the building fits with its neighbors.

DH refocused on the soffits which, if extended, and combined with recessed garage doors or an apparent setback by extending the jambs 18" to 24" (half the distance of the overhang) could create a beneficial shadowing effect. DH suggested reducing the depth of the garage from 22' to 21'6 to accommodate the exterior overhang. A larger trim board should be below the soffit. This will produce a four feet overhang over the garage doors. Down lights could be included within the soffit under these unusual circumstances.

KAB clarified that the discussion: a greater emphasis on the buildings' horizontality in order to minimize the garage doors. AR was comfortable with more roof lower down. She had been concerned about the ridge height. The tradeoff that KAB notes is acceptable to her.

KAB thinks DH's suggestions are good and would like AR to review how to reduce the ridge height. The spring point of the roof must be reduced or lower the plate. One way to do this is to reduce the interior height from nine to eight feet or reduce the pitch. In New England she would be less inclined to reduce the pitch. BR emphasized that this suggestion would only reduce the height by one foot.

PL, anticipating KAB's question, feels it is such an unusual site that she can consider the proposal. She does feel reducing the height if only by one foot, would likely be beneficial to the issue of mass. Efforts to preserve trees and add fencing have improved the impact. She encouraged the group to continue to consider additional alterations to enhance the facades.

KAB also feels the reduction of a foot could be significant. The overhang adding shadow is a great suggestion. She is concerned that small windows to the side of the front doors may not be a positive addition. Perhaps the door could be a little more off center. It was suggested to add glass to the pedestrian doors.

AR suggests reducing the number of porch posts which would allow the door to be moved off center. The porches would be better with wider, more generous steps.

KAB refocused the HDC members back to the larger question. Is this plan acceptable? DH indicated that the siting for the buildings is unique-far from the public way and only the front facades are visible. Garage doors in the front façade would only be acceptable in an instance such as this one. The details will be very important. Presently, there are too many indefinite design issues to describe by conditions within a COA.

KAB having sensed a willingness to accept the project conceptually, wanted to continue to work to minimize the mass, and to add design elements to help the buildings fit better into their surroundings. She asked that, if the applicant wouldn't agree to a time extension, then would the committee feel comfortable voting on the application with an extensive list of conditions?

DH feels that an extension is necessary.

AR appreciated the applicants' frustration. She supported DH's preference for an extension. She did feel comfortable accepting the proposal but with a long list of conditions.

PL emphasized how much distance she feels the HDC and applicants has come and how close the group is to an acceptance and an extension would be best.

BR listed a number of changes he thinks the applicants can accept and modify. Reducing the height or revising the pitch would, however, be an issue. In trying to create a quality project both inside and outside these

suggestions are serious modifications. He noted that several of the Surrounding, existing buildings are higher than this project. The applicant is willing to consider a short extension.

KAB asked AR whether she can be okay with no change in height.

KAB noted continuing concerns including windows, "Hardie" board in lieu of wood siding, a third dormer window added to the pairs, extending the porch steps, adding a fence on the property line, garage door types, and front doors with four lites. The applicant agreed to work with the abutters on a choice of acceptable fences. The fence design and materials will need to be presented to the HDC for approval.

AR will make suggestions on window samples. The front steps will be a composite material. Lighting fixtures may include down lites recessed into the soffits. Lighting fixtures for the front doors require cut sheets. Gutters will be limited to the porch areas. Ridge vents must extend the length of the ridge.

BR granted HDC an extension through September 12th. AR suggested that the architect could present options to save time.

KAB continued the public hearing until September 9th.

KAB moved to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by DH and accepted by unanimous consent at 10:38.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela Lynn
HDC Secretary